

# Don't stop flossing yet, say dental health professionals

By **ALAN BENNETT**  
Staff Writer

**BIDDEFORD** — A week after an Associated Press article purported to debunk the benefits of flossing, local dental health professionals are firing back.

"I hate to be too critical of peoples' articles, but I think it is slightly misleading," Jon Ryder, dean of the College of Dental Medicine at the University of New England, said Tuesday.

The article, "Medical benefits of dental floss unproven," was published on Aug. 2, and reported that there is weak scientific evidence to support the claim that flossing is necessary to prevent gum disease and other periodontal diseases.

Both the American Dental Association and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention still recommend flossing. The CDC suggests flossing once a day to prevent plaque buildup that can lead to gingivitis and gum disease.

The article's author, Jeff Donn, and a series of reviewers with the AP examined 25 studies about flossing from the past decade. They found that many studies did not run their experiments for periods of time long enough for cavities or gum disease to develop, and that many studies focused solely on gum inflammation, not gum disease.

Ryder said the AP article does not highlight the true issue at the heart of the matter, which is removing dangerous plaque buildup from teeth.

"This is not so much about the evidence surrounding a tool in the toolbox but more about how plaque is the problem and how we can reduce the amount of plaque in the mouth to prevent gum disease and tooth decay," Ryder said.

Gum disease is caused by a buildup of bacteria, a biofilm called plaque, when it grows on surfaces inside the mouth and between teeth, Ryder said. When this plaque is not removed, the bacteria can infect the gums and cause them to become inflamed, resulting in a disease called gingivitis.

If untreated, gingivitis may manifest into a condition known as periodontitis, or severe gum disease, which can cause the gums to pull away from the teeth and further result in bone loss, says the CDC.

According to 2012 data from the CDC, 47 percent of adults in the U.S. ages 30 and older have some form of periodontal disease.

The AP article also criticized the government, saying it formerly included flossing in its Dietary Guidelines for Americans, but no longer does — a move its author says was made after the AP filed a Freedom of Information Act request for evidence to support the claims that flossing was necessary for proper oral hygiene.

"(The AP article) starts off by saying that the government no longer supports flossing, which is not really what happened," Ryder said. "The government dropped flossing from the Dietary Guidelines for Americans report, but I think the reason, it seems to me, is because they're focusing on dietary issues and not mechanical issues surrounding eating food. They're really focusing on sugar."

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services sent a statement to the ADA at the beginning of August addressing its failure to include flossing in its 2015 dietary recommendations, despite including flossing in its 2010 revision.

HHS said flossing "was most likely identified as a supporting recommendation

along with brushing teeth, with the primary emphasis being on the nutrition-based recommendation to reduce added sugars."

Despite "Flossgate" — as the new hype surrounding flossing has been called on social media — Ryder said the article's findings won't affect how he teaches dental hygiene at UNE.

"There isn't any change in the (teaching) philosophy whatsoever. The students learn and understand the biomedical science behind plaque, and if flossing is part of the regimen to effectively remove plaque, then that's what we need to do," Ryder said.

Ryder did acknowledge the disparity between what dental professionals say and what the published studies may say is true, saying, "there's a difference between the research and the proven effectiveness of flossing."

Still, he said everyone should talk to their dentists to determine a proper flossing regimen because everybody's oral structure is different, and flossing may not be necessary as often for people with particularly straight teeth and healthy immune systems.

"Most people actually have missing or tilted or crooked teeth, and we need to have these (flossing) instruments at our disposal to help prevent further disease and reduce the amount of plaque on the teeth," Ryder said.

So, should you still floss? Ryder said it can't hurt.

"It's a pretty low-cost, non-invasive thing to do to be effective," he said. "It's pretty straightforward, and floss is still there and still necessary."

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## Land Trust

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Landscape Inc. to prune bushes of the invasive Asian rose species along the shoreland. City officials say KLT did not obtain the proper permits to trim the plants, putting it in violation of the town's zoning ordinance, which prohibits cutting existing vegetation within 75 feet of the high water line.

In the past, KLT has asserted it could prune the bushes with permission from the Maine Department of Environmental Protection — permission the organization didn't seek, local officials said.

"If KLT wasn't aware, they should've been, especially given what they're about," said Selectman Shiloh Schulte. "The extent of that violation was large and went onto private property, and they should've known about that."

Part of the land is owned by the Kennebunk Beach Improvement Association, a nonprofit organization that provides recreational activities to children. The land also lies within the town's resource protection and shoreland overlay districts.

KLT intended to prune the rose bushes from about 6 feet tall to 15 to 18 inches in height. But contractors accidentally trimmed the plants to about 6 to 8 inches tall, according to a Friday letter penned by Brad Meserve, owner of Boiling Spring Landscape Inc., which was made available in the selectmen's meeting packet.

Meserve's letter also alleges he was unaware that clearing the bushes in

that area was not allowed, despite being partially located on private property. Town records say it "does not appear that KBIA was a willing participant in the violation."

"We do want to apologize to the town and KBIA publicly for the transgressions we have done," said Tom Wellman, vice chairman of KLT. "We get that we broke the rules, and we just want to make sure the public understands the property has not been damaged by what we did."

KLT faced upward of \$2,500 in fines for violating land use regulations of Title 30-A of the Maine Revised Statutes, which, in lieu of court action against the KLT, regulates penalties for local zoning violations.

Selectmen settled on the \$500 fine, but also imposed a consent agreement upon the KLT for violating the Kennebunk Zoning Ordinance.

As part of the consent agreement, KLT must devise a remediation plan for the area affected by the illegal pruning and agree to not cut in the area again.

KLT must also pay Kennebunk \$10,554, which will be held by the town for two years to cover costs of the remediation plan; reimburse KBIA for \$957.50 in legal costs incurred during the time since the cutting; and pay back \$2,200 owed to KBIA for the cost of a surveyor to evaluate the site after the cutting took place.

"Our remediation plan is to not touch them; to let them grow. I very much want to stress the purpose of the pruning was for the health of the plants," Wellman said in refer-

ence to the roses — which, though invasive, are holding the beachfront sand dune together.

"I do want to stress to the people that the property is in pristine condition at this point and has not been harmed by the actions of the land trust," Wellman continued, when asked about potential erosion issues that may present themselves as a result of the pruning. "We didn't dig anything; we didn't stir up the soil at all. We left the soil alone. We just cut the plant."

The board based KLT's fine on the organization's knowledge and awareness of environmental and zoning regulations, extent of its violation, permanency of environmental impacts, and impacts to wildlife habitat and any history of violations.

Town Manager Barry Tibbetts said in a memo to selectmen that he believes the permissible uses of the property are now well understood, and that a restoration plan is available to the town.

He also said KLT is working with KBIA to settle the matter, and that there seems to be no significant environmental impact as a result of the clearing, nor does there appear any negative impact on habitat.

These factors were considered as the selectman issued its fine to KLT, the money from which will be applied to the town's Open Space Fund account and be used for future land preservation.

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TONIGHT	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
A t-storm in spots this evening	Partly sunny, humid and warmer	Clouds and sun with a thunderstorm	Not as warm; a stray p.m. t-storm
▼ 67°	▲ 89° ▼ 67°	▲ 89° ▼ 72°	▲ 78° ▼ 64°

**Today's Forecast**

Shown is tomorrow's weather. Temperatures are tonight's lows and tomorrow's highs.

**Tide Report**

**Kennebunkport:**

Day	Time	High	Time	Low
Wed.	5:11 a.m.	7.6	11:15 a.m.	1.2
	5:34 p.m.	8.1	11:51 p.m.	---
Thur.	6:04 a.m.	7.8	12:05 p.m.	1.6
	6:25 p.m.	8.5	---	---

**Old Orchard Beach:**

Day	Time	High	Time	Low
Wed.	5:01 a.m.	8.1	11:00 a.m.	1.3
	5:24 p.m.	8.6	11:38 p.m.	1.4
Thur.	5:53 a.m.	7.8	11:49 a.m.	1.6
	6:15 p.m.	8.5	---	---

**Marine Forecast**

Eastport to Merrimac River

Wind southwest 7-14 knots tonight. Seas 3-5 feet. A thunderstorm in spots. Wind southwest 6-12 knots tomorrow. Seas 2-4 feet. Visibility clear. Wind southwest 6-12 knots tomorrow night. Seas 2-4 feet. Partly cloudy. Friday: Wind southwest 8-16 knots. Seas 2-4 feet. Visibility under 2 miles in a shower or thunderstorm. Water temperature: 60.

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